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## **Executive Summary**

**Title:** *Modern Diplomacy as a Future Military Function*

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**Thesis:** Modern public diplomacy is a function that the military must regularly perform to favorably shape future conflict.

**Discussion:** At its core, public diplomacy is a negotiation. Modern public diplomacy has changed the conduct of the negotiation so that it more closely resembles conflict. In this form, public diplomacy serves dual purposes; it acts as a negotiating tool or as a means to wage unconventional warfare. The public information environment reinforces public diplomacy's nature and shapes its conduct. Four factors dominate this environment, culture, technology, volume and speed. The military is an effective instrument to conduct modern public diplomacy, but it possess limited capability to do so. Through interagency cooperation and the development of organic capabilities, the military can establish a public diplomacy strategy that drives operational and tactical goals. Future military operations can then incorporate public diplomacy objectives.

**Conclusion(s) or Recommendation(s):** The military must first understand how modern public diplomacy affects in the battlespace. It must then garner the political and military support necessary for institutional change and advocate for legislation or an interagency agreement that achieves greater unity of effort for national public diplomacy goals. Lastly, it must invest in public diplomacy capabilities in force structure, training and education, and equipment to achieve public diplomacy objectives as part of its military operations.

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## **Introduction**

Public diplomacy is an open negotiation between parties that seek a resolution compatible with their respective interests or policies. Civil discourse and compromise characterize its highest conduct. At its lowest, public diplomacy resembles warfare in a Clausewitzian model with ‘hostile and independent wills’ vying to compel each other into submission through the use of threats and violence.<sup>2</sup> In this combative role, public diplomacy serves dual purposes for weak nation-states or non-state actors. It is both a negotiating tool and a means to wage an unconventional (and at this time, asymmetric) war.

Modern public diplomacy exists at the lower end of the spectrum. In the information age, it is emerging as a conflict-oriented test of wills. The communications and trade that link the global village shape its environment and fuel its growing influence. Public diplomacy now occurs through both words and deeds; words that range from virulent ideologies to press briefings and deeds that span terrorist acts and military operations. In an environment that resembles more of a disjointed and deadly struggle than the regular ‘give and take’ of public diplomacy, it is easy to lose sight of the role public diplomacy can play in preventing, shaping and resolving conflict.

Today’s military finds itself in the difficult position of defeating an irregular force on the battlefield while conducting public diplomacy that counters the enemy and reinforces U.S. policy; in effect, it is negotiating with multiple audiences simultaneously. Despite the spate of activity from the 1990s to present (Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, etc.) in which public diplomacy played a leading role, the military has not sufficiently invested in this capability. It remains a force tooled for large-scale, force-on-force operations. The downward spiral of public

diplomacy as evidenced by the GWOT indicates a need to invest in *low-tech* capabilities that better handle the nuances of modern public diplomacy's nature and environment.

### **Modern Public Diplomacy's Nature**

When public diplomacy approximates conflict, negotiations take the form of public statements and counterstatements, actions and counteractions. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict offers an interesting case study of this dynamic. Hostile statements by both sides are followed by homicide bombings or military action. The messages are violent and public. They target the mind and go to the essence of conflict by strengthening or weakening the collective will of a government and its people. As part of the "moral or psychological element in conflict, these messages can exert decisive influence."<sup>3</sup>

A typical scenario today might follow along these lines. Insurgent forces in Iraq take a hostage from Country X. They exploit the media and the hostage's desperation to publicly negotiate with Country X for the removal of its forces. Country X issues a counterstatement supporting the hostage but maintaining its position on Iraq. Forces in Iraq then execute the hostage in one final message until the next round of negotiations. Recent events have seen variations on this theme in which threats or violence occur at critical junctures such as prior to an election or during policy deliberations. Aside from their timing, the use of open threats and violence characterize the negotiations and represent public diplomacy's modern nature.

For irregular forces, using public diplomacy in this fashion makes sense. It often conveys a popular message and rallies sympathetic groups. It can lead to greater conventional means of waging war by strengthening the resolve or will of these groups. They may then provide manpower through recruitment or financial support through contributions. Public diplomacy can also invigorate and protract a conflict as more allies support its message. Fragile coalitions may

fracture under pressure from public opinion. In democracies, where popular support is *sine qua non* for political survival, public diplomacy may target opposing political leaders through the public that elects them. Public diplomacy is a combat multiplier and its potential should not be lost upon Americans.

Our own struggle for independence was preceded by an intense public diplomacy campaign. Testifying to its effect, John Adams wrote, “The American Revolution is in the minds of the colonists”. Influential civic and religious leaders used public diplomacy through extra-legal governments portraying British rule as a form of enslavement. Clergy exploited the pulpit to promote anti-British sentiment. In *A Revolutionary People at War*, Charles Royster writes, “By the time war came, the religious call to seek salvation had taken on a political concern for the welfare of America and liberty. At the same time, the effort to secure liberty had acquired the emotional urgency of a test of righteousness.”<sup>4</sup> Infused with martial fervor, America’s ultimate act of public diplomacy, *The Declaration of Independence*, formalized the American Revolution. Through public diplomacy, public opinion galvanized, militias mobilized and the conventional means necessary for a successful insurgency materialized. The result was a favorably negotiated settlement, the Treaty of Paris, granting U.S. independence.

How might our own struggle for independence been intensified by modern public diplomacy? What would have been the effect of a Fox News report from the Boston Massacre or the impact of a George Washington blog<sup>5</sup> extolling the virtues of liberty while condemning the iniquities of British rule? History suggests that these messages would have better sustained the colonies’ “rage militaire” and hastened the course of the war. As early as 1940, the Marine Corps’ *Small Wars Manual* (SWM) noted, “the rapidity with which a revolution develops is made possible by modern communications facilities and publicity methods.”<sup>6</sup>



The American Revolution helps illustrate the nature of modern public diplomacy. Public diplomacy creates favorable conditions to negotiate or to fight. Its message acts as a stimulus to cause individual or collective action to influence negotiations and the battlespace. However, public diplomacy's message does not exist in a vacuum. Instead, it must compete with all public information in an environment with certain characteristics and parameters that determine the extent to which it is received, interpreted, or blocked.

### **Public Diplomacy's Environment**

Public diplomacy exists within the realm of public information, *all* public information. Four factors predominate the modern public information environment: culture, technology, volume and speed.

#### **Culture**

Culture acts as a filter for public information. Public diplomacy's messages must first wend their way through an audience's cultural perspective to convey meaning. Ignoring cultural context loses or distorts a message. "People perceive things that make sense within the context of their beliefs, values, attitudes and experiences. Since we cannot possibly perceive all stimuli at any given time, our perceptions are highly selective and subjective."<sup>7</sup> Culture acts as a sieve on public information allowing public diplomacy messages to flow through only if they fit within cultural norms.

#### **Technology**

Technology has altered public information and correspondingly the conduct of public diplomacy. It conveys messages instantaneously to increasingly larger audiences. Consider Iraq; in a country of roughly 24 million people, some seven million satellite dishes were ordered after the fall of Saddam Hussein *within a year*.<sup>8</sup> Technology has also fragmented public

information among greater outlets. Cable and satellite television, the internet and radio distribute information in countless formats. Within this environment, mastering disparate technologies and formats has become a key to unlock public diplomacy's potential.

For this reason, media technology has become the handmaiden of irregular forces. Expressed through modern media, their videos, music, art, or poetry 'tell their story'. When these forces link-up with news outlets looking to fill holes in a 24-hour cycle, a trend occurs in which "those who would manipulate the press and public appear to be gaining leverage over the journalists who cover them."<sup>9</sup> The result is a one-sided negotiation to a widespread audience with the potential to trigger a large, sympathetic public response.

As technology proliferates, it also decentralizes public diplomacy among many 'messengers'. Considerable benefit goes to those who can just convey a coherent position. Traditional venues such as carefully planned speeches and comments by principal civic leaders do not occur frequently and so into this vacuum step bit players who conduct 'unofficial' public diplomacy through press conferences, interviews, movies, their political parties, news articles, and so forth.

## **Volume**

Public diplomacy as a communiqué between antagonists represents a small subset of public information. Consider the volume of information made public daily by newspapers, magazines, books, television, radio, the internet and other sources. The news cycle contains new information hourly. Older information recedes or becomes outdated as more current information surfaces.

In order to prevent being subsumed or marginalized by the volume of public information, public diplomacy's messages tend toward the sensational. This competition 'to be heard'

reinforces public diplomacy's violent nature promoting ever more shocking words and deeds. It also results in more frequent instances. Messages must be repetitive and consistent to clearly mark a position. If one violent act fails to influence negotiations, then it is repeated until it does.

## **Speed**

Lastly, the pace and timing of public information affects public diplomacy. This speed creates a time-competitive environment. The 'spin cycle' in U.S. politics that leverages the media's speed for political advantage captures this phenomenon. In this model, no political message goes unchallenged for more than a few hours, if not minutes. Military personnel also associate this with the Boyd cycle or OODA Loop in which an individual or unit; *observes* an adversary and the environment; *orients* within this frame of reference; *decides* on the most advantageous course to take; and *acts* accordingly. A faster cycle would create momentum and tempo, yielding an advantage in battle, politics or public diplomacy.

## **Domestic Public Diplomacy**

The U.S. military has been negotiating with the American public directly and through its elected representatives since George Washington first took up arms and requested the manpower and logistics necessary to fight the British. Its 'top-down, bottom-up refinement' approach to command adapts well in public diplomacy's fast-paced environment. Today's military continues to successfully use public diplomacy as a means to recruit an all-volunteer force.

Static displays featuring military hardware, air shows with military aircraft, recruiting campaigns and slogans, all contribute to the negotiating process. Demonstrating cultural awareness, commercials air during key time slots (read: major sporting events) in order to attract an "Army of One" or "The Few, The Proud". Service web sites help tell a compelling 'military story'. Military recruiters pursue potential recruits via interview and telephone. And if that

fails, money works too. Basic pay, bonuses (for enlistment and reenlistment), housing allowances, subsistence allowances, cost of living adjustments and retirement benefits form just some of the financial incentives to influence negotiations with individuals in an all-volunteer force. The domestic public diplomacy message is clear and consistent. It is conveyed through modern mediums. It says basically, the military plays a vital role in our Nation and offers personal and financial opportunities to you and your family.

### **Public Diplomacy Abroad**

If the military's domestic public diplomacy trumpets clearly then its foreign public diplomacy could best be described as muted. Caught in the competing doctrines of large-scale conventional warfare and constabulary type peace operations, military forces lack the force structure and resources to conduct effective public diplomacy abroad. Specifically, no current military function or capability performs public diplomacy abroad.

'Information operations' is a term frequently used to approximate public diplomacy. However, information operations, by their nature, primarily affect an adversary's information or information systems while supporting one's own.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, the military deception component of information operations is not compatible with negotiating. Foreign audiences are domestic audiences and vice versa; when revealed, military deception detracts from a negotiator's credibility. The kinetic and nonkinetic capabilities inherent in information operations can favorably shape the public information environment, but they cannot alter public diplomacy's basic nature. In short, information operations cannot negotiate.

Civil Affairs has also been bandied about synonymously with public diplomacy. Civil affairs teams can support public diplomacy by interfacing with indigenous populations to discern an enemy's cultural pressure points and to determine friendly objectives. Civil Affairs

specialists can also interface with interagency, government and private organizations to leverage unique capabilities in support of military objectives. However, Civil Affairs Teams are not a panacea for shortfalls in public diplomacy capability. What these highly qualified teams cannot do is communicate far beyond their respective contacts. They must rely on others to convey their message. Without the means to communicate broadly in public diplomacy's environment, the message goes largely unheard.

Public affairs provide some of the capability to communicate but their technological and cultural expertise is geared more toward domestic than foreign audiences. One unfortunate consequence of the 'CNN effect' is that commanders must focus an undue amount of their public affairs toward domestic public diplomacy. As a result, when confronted with an irregular force using the internet, motivational videos set to music, televised interviews, or even graffiti to convey their message, the public affairs community is at a distinct disadvantage.

Ironically, the capability that most closely performs public diplomacy is that possessed by conventional military forces. Dead enemy and a clear message convey readily through the media. Military action also reduces the enemy's public diplomacy capability by diminishing credibility and eliminating sponsors. However, the cost for this public diplomacy is not only high, it is a double-edged sword. Friendly casualties may negate, as well as propagate, any message being sent.

The military can begin to remedy its foreign public diplomacy deficiency by leveraging the expertise and capabilities resident in the Department of State (DOS). The DOS has a traditional purview over diplomacy, traditional or public. As a case in point, the DOS, Office of the Undersecretary of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs displays on its website that "public diplomacy (engaging, informing, and influencing key international audiences) is practiced in

harmony with public affairs (outreach to Americans) and traditional diplomacy to advance U.S. interests and security and to provide the moral basis for U.S. leadership in the world.”<sup>11</sup> Aside from the hubris intoned toward foreign audiences who look elsewhere for a moral basis (their religion perhaps or their *own* government), the mission statement sets off public diplomacy as a key function of the DOS.

For the Department of Defense (DOD) whose operating forces are also concerned with engaging, informing, and influencing key international audiences to advance U.S. interests and security, the challenge becomes how to conduct public diplomacy in conjunction with DOS or at least achieve unity of effort. The crosscutting imperative of legislation, similar to a Goldwater-Nichols Act, would mandate interagency cooperation. In the absence of legislation, a working agreement must be pursued and the internecine turf wars of domestic politics avoided.

The DOS can also benefit from a closer relationship with the military. The military operates forward and its presence and versatility can help the DOS better perform its mission. The military’s presence brings it in regular contact with the same public with whom both negotiate. The edge of the battlefield is also the edge of public diplomacy. The military’s versatility allows its helicopters to ferry troops and supplies one moment and to ferry relief supplies to tsunami victims the next. The engineers who fight forward to breach minefields can also build schools, hospitals and roads. The DOS can leverage these military capabilities by contributing its voice to the military’s public diplomacy.

Public diplomacy interagency cooperation *throughout the executive branch* would result in a more complete National Security Strategy by providing a mechanism to shape national public diplomacy goals. Civilian and uniformed leaders could then reflect these goals in the

National Military Strategy. Lower level public diplomacy objectives derived from these goals can then be pursued wholeheartedly as part of coherent military strategy.

### **Military Strategy and Public Diplomacy**

Public diplomacy objectives should establish the going-in position for negotiations. They provide context and focus for lower level objectives and they enable commanders to negotiate effectively. A Special Forces Officer from Vietnam notes what happens when public diplomacy occurs ‘on the cheap’ with singular capabilities outside of a coherent strategy, “At its worst, PsyOps is measured in millions of leaflets and thousands of hours of radio broadcast time; Civic Action is a give-away program and sick call. At its best, these can be of overwhelming importance, but only if they are integrated into the overall program and administered with an understanding of the needs and motivations of the people.”<sup>11</sup> Properly nested within a military strategy, commanders can pursue public diplomacy objectives as part of conventional military operations to good effect. The Vietnam War provides another illustration.

North Vietnam’s grand strategy sought the reunification and independence of Vietnam under communist rule. One of its primary military obstacles was the U.S. military and in particular, the Air Force’s bombing campaign, Operation ROLLING THUNDER. The air interdiction made problematic moving and sustaining National Liberation Front (NLF) combat power to the South. Stopping or mitigating the bombing became a strategic military goal. Ho Chi Minh’s desire “to win the battle of public opinion on the world arena”<sup>12</sup> provided the impetus to achieve this goal through public diplomacy objectives as part of conventional operations.

Portraying the bombing campaign as inhumane and cruel became a public diplomacy objective. North Vietnam emphasized the deaths of innocent civilians. They publicized anti-war

statements from pilots taken as prisoners of war. Interviews conducted with influential celebrities condemning the bombings bolstered popular support and peace movements in the United States. Concurrently, North Vietnam combined more robust air defense assets imported from the Soviet Union with NLF military attacks on U.S. airbases.

The North Vietnamese ultimately sowed sufficient discord within the United States to halt the bombings and realize a reunified, independent, and communist Vietnam. The example serves to demonstrate that public diplomacy can be conducted as part of an overall military strategy. It also underscores a mutual support between public diplomacy and conventional military operations.

## **Future Operations**

*We had to arrange their minds in order of battle just as carefully and as formally as other officers would arrange their bodies. And not only our own men's minds, though naturally they came first. We must also arrange the minds of the enemy, so far as we could reach them; then those other minds of the nation supporting us behind the firing line, since more than half the battle passed there in the back; then the minds of the enemy nation waiting the verdict; and of the neutrals looking on; circle beyond circle.*<sup>13</sup>

Future operations will take into account public diplomacy's nature and its environment. Public diplomacy will be viewed as a negotiation and as a means to wage unconventional war. Individual minds will be considered as part of the future battlespace. A broad brush public diplomacy framework established by regional combatant commanders through an interagency process will provide the overarching mission and intent for operational and tactical level commanders to establish public diplomacy objectives as part of their military operations. Military commanders will conduct public diplomacy "to induce or reinforce foreign attitudes and behavior favorable to their objectives."<sup>14</sup> They will combat the enemy's messages as well as his forces.



Commanders will pursue operations as they do currently, planning for the kinetic and nonkinetic effects of those operations. Planners will evaluate public diplomacy in developing courses of action alongside conventional battlefield functions such as force protection or maneuver. To address shortfalls, commanders will request from higher headquarters the public diplomacy capabilities needed to exploit the public information environment. Methodically and repetitively, the enemy and his messages will be attacked until he can no longer negotiate effectively.

Decentralized execution will allow subordinate commanders to “to exploit fleeting public diplomacy opportunities, respond to developing problems, modify schemes, or redirect efforts.”<sup>15</sup> At the end of a mission, a regional combatant commander might first see a tactical public diplomacy objective achieved on television instead of hearing about it at the backbrief. If done properly, he may see or hear it three or four times in different mediums.

By establishing a public diplomacy staff section that function on par with normal staff sections for planning and execution, commanders can quickly cut to the chase. Civil or public affairs officers, psychological operations officers or regional affairs officers could head this section. They would aid the commander’s decision-making process directly or through forming an operational planning team. Within this section fall those units and individuals with the skill sets to facilitate public diplomacy: civil affairs, public affairs, foreign service officers, human exploitation teams, provincial reconstruction teams, government and nongovernmental agencies dealing with the public such as linguists, cultural experts, humanitarian relief organizations, etc. Added to this section should be the technical expertise and equipment necessary to communicate effectively. Subject matter experts in fields such as audio-visual, computer, television, radio, marketing, and even cartoons can be used effectively.

Foreign language and culture training will create a savvy force that can employ public diplomacy to its fullest. The unique perspective and insights of a culturally aware military can discern effective public diplomacy tactics, techniques, and procedures. Their knowledge will also facilitate decentralized execution of public diplomacy allowing feedback necessary for commanders to refine and repeat public diplomacy messages in a cyclic process that generates tempo.

## **Conclusions**

Public diplomacy is the art and practice of negotiating in the open. The information age has changed its environment and conduct. The threats and violence that now characterize public diplomacy impact the battlespace and pose a greater threat to U.S. military forces than in the past. The U.S. military must adapt by expanding its traditional warfighting capabilities to deal with this threat. To do so, it must establish interagency cooperation and develop a military strategy that incorporates public diplomacy objectives into military operations at all levels of war. Future operations can then combine the talents of a more diverse force structure with foreign training and education initiatives to leverage the latent force of modern public diplomacy.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> D. Powell, "Public Affairs Guidance: Force Structure Review Group" (HQMC, 2005)
- <sup>2</sup> Michael Howard and Peter Paret, eds. *Carl Von Clausewitz On War Indexed ed.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 75.
- <sup>3</sup> Howard and Paret 127.
- <sup>4</sup> Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1980) 18.
- <sup>5</sup> A blog (short for web log) is a personal journal on the internet that is frequently updated and intended for general public consumption.
- <sup>6</sup> United States Marine Corps, *The Small Wars Manual* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1940) I-13.
- <sup>7</sup> Frank L. Goldstein and Benjamin F. Findley, Jr., *Psychological Operations* (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1996) 59.
- <sup>8</sup> Iraq's Television Revolution. 25 Feb 2005. BBC News. 28Feb2005.  
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- <sup>10</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub 3-13, *Joint Doctrine for Information Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 9 October 1998) I-1.
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- <sup>13</sup> T. E. Lawrence, Seven Pillars of Wisdom (New York: Doubleday, 1935) 195.
- <sup>14</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub 3-53, *Doctrine for Joint Psychological Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 10 July 1996) IV-1.
- <sup>15</sup> United States Marine Corps, MCDP 6, *Command and Control* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1996) 40.
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